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THE KARENS OF BURMA

437 opium on the quiet, grow rich at the expense of their
444 neighbours. They usually come to Burma single but they
563 can easily marry, for their prosperity attracts the young
426 women, and then they settle down to raise a family of
mixed blood, and make a real contribution to the life of
the country.

463 The Karens are at home in the forests. In many
313 cases they became expert foresters for the Government
231 and for the timber firms. Where the use of elephants
was needed they were largely employed. There were at
the time of the invasion a number of Karen timber con-
tractors owning elephants which they understood and
knew how to catch and train and use in hauling logs
from the jungles to the river banks where in the rains
the swelling streams carried them down to the markets at
Moulmein and Rangoon.

The Karens have established a safe way of training
newly-caught elephants for timber use. Instead of the
more cruel methods of jabbing and brow-beating often
used by Indian elephant drivers, they tie the animals up
to the large trees left near the point of the V-shaped
corral that they build along the elephant runs in the
jungle, and then they keep the animals from sleeping by
continually feeding and working with them for five or
more days, until they subdue their wild spirit and win
them to obedience to their keepers. Thus in six months
they can train a full-grown animal to follow the directions
of its keeper and drag out logs.

● 177 From the first contacts with the "Younger White
797 Brother" their desire to read the Book which he brought
212 them was very keen. In the beginning men and some
women of all ages went to school to be able to read the

OCCUPATIONS

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precious Book. As soon as one made a little progress he was required to go out and teach others. In this way schools sprang up all over the country wherever the people turned to the Christian teaching. Teachers were much respected. They were addressed as *Thra*. With the increase of education went an increase in the standards of training. Many of them were called to go to Upper Burma and teach in schools run by private agencies, by missions and by the Education Department of Government. In the spreading of the Christian teaching among many of the outlying tribes of Upper Burma and the Chin Hills the Karen teachers played a very important part, often undergoing the same hardships that foreign teachers had to bear among more primitive tribes.

During recent years the Karens have taken up all occupations. Their more general education and newly-developed adaptability to take on new ways have given them openings in offices as clerks, in the police, in the army where they have played an important part even as they have in the professions. A number of Karens have taken up medicine, among the most distinguished of whom was Sir San C Po, of Bassein.

Young Karen women have made a name for themselves as nursemaids. Their gentle ways and general reliability have made them most popular and many of them have cared for children of European officers. Several of them have been to England and America. They have also done very well as regular registered nurses in the hospitals and there was hardly a hospital in Burma in which there was not one, or more, Karen nurse. Their work on the whole has been very satisfactory.

With the coming of machinery the Karens have taken

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- 177 With the coming of machinery the Karens have taken
 463 to mechanics. In the machine shops, foundries and work-
 401 shops of the big companies, and in the oil fields they
 have played their part. They have also done well as
 motor-car mechanics and drivers as well as in electrical
 engineering. In mining they have done their share,
 although for very difficult underground tunnelling I
 believe they have not been found as daring as the Gurkhas
 of Nepal.

V

RELIGION

- 776 Primitive Karens are animists, worshipping the
 782 spirits with which their imaginations people the pheno-
 mena of nature, the hills, the streams, and any unusual
 [82] happenings which they see around them. The changes
 of season are due to conflict between the demons (often
 called by their Burmese name *nats*) of the dry weather
 and the wet. Those are victorious whose season is
 prevailing at the time. The banyan is supposed to be
 the abode of a very vigorous spirit, probably because the
 seeds of that tree spring up in all kinds of unsuspected
 places.

In addition to the spirits of the wood and mountain
 there are the family Penates called the *Bgha* that, when
 offended, cause illness by eating the *Kala* (psyche) of the
 person and ultimately cause his death if allowed to go
 on. They must be appeased by offerings of chicken or
 pig. Every member of the family must be present on the
 occasion to save one member from illness. It is hoped
 that the feast will be so tempting that the demon will
 leave the sufferer and take the food instead. The customs
 connected with these feasts differ in various localities and

RELIGION

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among different tribes. In many of the more civilized sections they are no longer carefully observed. Christians do not resort to them. 776
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Sex irregularities are believed to be most abhorrent to the *bgba* and are reputed to have been the cause of most trouble. Among the Bwès they are considered to cause the drying up of land and the failure of crops, and are therefore most severely punished by the elders when discovered. In their primitive state the Karens were unusually free from fornication and adultery. The recent transition period, with the breaking down of old customs and before Western ideals have been established, has seen some relaxation of these conditions. 776
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The old epic song about Ywa, the Father God and Creator, and this belief in the existence of God are found among all the tribes. It does not, however, play an important part in their daily lives which are taken up with their struggles with the ever-present *nais* and demons. 771
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Those Karens who were in closest contact with the Burmans, as for example the Pwo Karens, took on a thin veneer of Buddhism and went to the pagodas at the full moon and the quarters, but as a rule it was largely a social conforming that did not have a deep spiritual content. 779
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LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Karen is an agglutinated monosyllabic language belonging to the Sinic family of languages. Like the Chinese it has tones, which are important in learning to speak it, for the same sound may have entirely different 194
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194 meanings if spoken in different tones. For example, the
197 syllable *Meh* may mean 'eye', 'sand', 'tail', 'mole' (on the body), or 'tooth', according to the tone in which it is uttered.

538 Originally the Karens had a mass of unwritten bard
173 literature, poems and stories handed down orally and recited around the fireplaces, from generation to generation. Some of these were epic poems which related the history of their race, and others folk stories which they told for amusement and which served to keep alive the traditions of their tribes. Many of these stories were much like the Negro folk tales told in America under the title of "Uncle Remus Stories", or like Grimms' Fairy Tales in Europe. In these Karen folk stories the rabbit figures as the wily one as it does in the Negro tales, and as the fox appears in the European stories.

538 Their epic poems have remarkable accounts of the
773 creation of the world by *Ywa*, who closely resembles the
524 God of the Hebrew Scriptures. They tell of the origin
● 177 of the human race and the expulsion from a garden, which is similar to the story of Paradise Lost. The poems are in five stress lines and are in couplet form like Hebrew poetry. In their earlier days there use to be rhyming contests or "capping rhymes" as an important part of gatherings such as wedding and funeral feasts. At present they only survive among the most primitive villages away from outside influences.

197 There are many dialects of the Karen language—
212 probably about twenty of them. They fall into six groups: the Sgaw, Pwo, Bwè, Padaung, Karenni and Zayein. The Sgaw and Pwo are the two largest groups. These are the two which have been used in education and in

197 stand, Pwo because of the nasal effect on the pro-
194 nunciation.

197 The Bwè dialects, spoken near Toungoo in the hills
● 177 about Thandaung, have many nasal sounds and somewhat
resemble the Pwo. Other dialects in the mountains differ
quite widely from each other but the people in the hills
speak several of these dialects for there is now much more
intermingling than there was formerly when feuds kept
the people apart and made it possible for different dialects
to grow up even within a few miles of each other.

193 The grammar of the various dialects is not difficult.
The sentence is formed after the same model as the
English, with subject, verb, and object. The written and
spoken language are very similar and direct. There are
honorifics as in Burmese. There is no sex designation
in the names of individuals, and so the Karens use *Saw*
for all men and *Naw* for all women or girls.

212 When Westerners first came into contact with them
177 the Karens had no written language. But so urgent was
773 the demand of those who accepted the missionaries as
797 fulfilling the prophecies uttered by their old poets that
some day they would be found by the "Younger White
Brother" who would come across the sea in great ships
"with white wings" and bring them the Book which their
ancestors were supposed to have neglected and lost, that
Dr. Wade, in about 1830, reduced the language of the
Sgaw dialect to writing. He used the Burmese alphabet,
for at that time any Karen who knew anything about
reading could read in the Burmese language of the
monastery. It was not then foreseen that English and
the Roman letter would occupy such an important place
in world affairs as they now enjoy.

Mr. Brayton a little later did the same for the Pwo dialect. The desire to read and to have an education arose among the Karens who became Christians, and as the Sgaw tribe has come into the Christian Church in much larger numbers than the Pwo it has consequently developed a larger literature. The greater part of this is of a distinctly Christian nature, designed to promote the spiritual life as well as to give general information. The people have not had time to create a modern literature of their own although a small beginning had been made before the Japanese invasion. No doubt out of the hardships of these war years a new literature will be born.

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DRESS

The Karens had a distinctive dress in their primitive state. Not only was there a national style but each individual village in the hills had its distinctive variations which marked a man's origin.

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The general dress of the Karens was an uncut garment made by sewing together two breadths of cloth as they came from the rude loom, leaving a hole in the middle of one end for the head and two small holes at the upper corners for the arms. It was made of their own home-grown cotton, which was raised, carded, spun and woven, as well as dyed, by their women-folk. The ground was usually white as it came unbleached from the loom. They interwove decorations of red and sometimes of black.

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Among the Sgaw Karens the smock (called a *Hsay*) was white with a wide lower border of red. The garment reached from the shoulders to the calves and was the only bit of clothing worn. It was large and

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291 roomy so that a man could squat down and pull his knees up inside the garment. Sometimes it was folded around the loins as its wearer squatted on the ground or mat. On cold mornings extra warmth was obtained by wrapping a blanket round the body, either a thick one of the same hand-woven cotton, or one of wool bought from some bazaar.

In the Toungoo Hills, the Bwè and other tribes usually wore a shorter smock, with all kinds and variations of stripes, which would hardly reach to their knees. They covered their legs with baggy Shan "bombies" or pants, usually black in colour.

291 For a number of years the Karens on the plains and
 ● 177 in the towns have worn the usual Burmese dress consisting of a *longyi* (skirt) with a white jacket in the warm weather and dark thick imported clothing in the cold.

562 The usual dress for the women has been the *longyi*,
 291 worn over the lower part of the body and a shorter *hsay*
 286 or smock over the upper part. The former was woven by the women themselves but the latter was often of imported cloth, usually black. Sometimes black velvet was used for the smock. Among the Sgaws the finest smocks were made of homespun black or dark blue cloth and were trimmed with rows of Job's Tears, the white seeds that grow readily in their plantations. Otherwise, bits of blue or red ribbon or strips of cloth were used for
 301 ornaments. Often many strings of beads were wrapped
 751 about the neck, some of which were supposed to have magical value to ward off evil spirits.

586 The women of the villages near Thandaung among
 291 the Bwès, or Mopghas as they call themselves, wove very
 178 elaborate skirts in which a number of colours were beauti-

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178 fully blended together, but the weaving of these skirts was almost a lost art at the time of the invasion.

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562 Little children were wrapped in blankets or in garments that were cast off by their elders. When romping boys began to run around they did not bother with clothes until they were five or six, or even older. Little girls usually began to wrap a small *longyi* about their waists at three or four. Elders often went about with scant loin cloths, but very seldom did they appear without any clothing.

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● 177 With the rise of national self-consciousness, the Karens tried an adaptation of their national dress and, finding the old smock ill-adapted to modern conditions, they invented a jacket cut after the style of the ordinary European lounge jacket made of the native cloth and embroidered with some of the designs of the original smocks. There were many patterns of these and they became very popular among the younger men in the cities and towns and among older boys in schools. They were a sort of blazer such as is worn in schools in Europe or America. A few Karens adopted the European style of men's dress, but few women in the cities wore anything except the usual Burmese costume.

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773 Among the Bwès and Pakus, another tribe near Toungoo, the women all wore skirts of an identical pattern. This had a black ground with two or three narrow horizontal stripes at about the height of the knees. But among the Sgaws there was a large number of patterns. The most common was a conventional design of horizontal stripes of various shades of red and in the middle a "python skin" in clouded pattern. This commemorated the old myth of the woman who was stolen by the

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The generations through which they have been exploited by their more powerful neighbours have left a stamp upon them and even educated men and women often allow themselves to be outdone in office and shop simply because they dislike to evoke contention. Often the faithful work of an individual does not bring the proper credit to the one earning it, for another steps in and takes advantage of his reticence to claim honour which he does not deserve.

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In the old days retaliation for the exploitation they underwent at the hands of the Burmans would be taken by their striking back whenever they saw an opportunity. Small parties of Burmans who were caught in the Karen hills seldom returned alive. It was not because the Karens were worse than others or more given to atrocities, but simply that to them it was a way of getting what they thought was justice.

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In their original condition they not only made forays against other races but were continually at feuds among themselves. The theft of a buffalo or a bronze drum, or the kidnapping of a child or a slave, was occasion for a foray. These usually went on and continued from bad to worse until villages were destroyed and many lives were lost. There were no other courts of justice.

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The Karens felt the lack of the Book, as they called the Bible,—a need that contributed to what we now would call an inferiority complex. But like all people, either individuals or nations, that have an inferiority complex they were ready and waiting to be led out into greater freedom. They hailed the coming of the American Baptist missionaries as those who could help them to find themselves, to get their rights and to free themselves from the thraldoms into which they were conscious that they had

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- 177 fallen. They told a story to illustrate this, for they spoke
181 in parables in order to explain many of the situations in which they found themselves.

538 They said they were like a family which built their little hut for a shelter while cultivating a hillside. There the children and the old sow and her piglets were left while the parents went off over the hillside to cut the jungle and make their clearing. One day a tiger came in and grabbed the sow and carried her off, much to the distress of the children. When the parents returned in the evening they were told what had happened and the father determined to put the children and piglets up on a high bamboo platform out of reach of the tiger before they went to their work the next morning.

The tiger returned and finding no prey within reach set up a howl as he vainly tried to jump to the platform. The children stood it as long as they could and then threw down a pig to appease the beast. This they did at intervals while all the time they were longing to hear the twang of the father's bowstring that would send an arrow quivering through the heart of the tiger. This, the Karens said, represented their condition as they waited for the "white brother" to come and free them from the slavery to evil spirits and give them the Book that would enable them to hold up their heads among the peoples of Burma.

177 Under the impulse of Christianity the desire for
181 education was strong from the beginning of the contact
797 of the Karens with the Westerners. They wanted to read their own Book and to have a broader education. They demanded to be taught the English language. The early missionaries desired only to train them for a more abundant life in their own country and for a time refused to teach

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- 177 them a language that might denationalize them. But
 181 when they sought outside teachers who would instruct
 797 them in English, the missionaries agreed to carry on
 schools in that language, and there grew up the Anglo-
 Vernacular system (English combined with the vernacu-
 lars, Burmese and Karen) that reached up to the
 153 University with its degrees. Karen students usually are
 871 slower to grasp new ideas than Burmans, but they often
 retain them better and have been, in proportion to their
 numbers, just as good students as any other race in the
 country. When they get over their reticence and fears
 they seem to be able to succeed in any endeavour for which
 they have the aptitude.

- 186 The Karens are often accused of being clannish. They
 582 are, but it is their natural self-interest which leads them to
 cling to each other for protection from their more powerful
 neighbours. For the same reason they condemn marriage
 outside the tribe.

- 181 Although physically the Karen seems to, an outsider
 152 closely to resemble the Burman, he has many very
 101 different racial characteristics which make it difficult for
 the two peoples to understand each other. The Burman
 is much like his own national emblem, the peacock, given
 to show and to a great appreciation of fine feathers. He
 likes to do things quickly and not too thoroughly. He
 watches those whom he desires to please and caters to their
 tastes. He uses many honorifics and is diplomatic in his
 language and manner. He often wears a silk *longyi* of
 dainty colours over a body that is rough and unwashed.

The Karen wears his dirty clothes over his unwashed
 person and feels that the two go together. He cares
 nothing for personal appearance. He is abrupt in his

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feel safer there than with any other people in the country. 152
When Karens are convinced of one's honesty and truth- [572]
fulness and genuine friendliness they will prove themselves
to be true friends and they will inconvenience themselves
no end to make that friendship good.

In common with some of the other Hill peoples of 533
south-eastern Asia, they have a great love for music.
Their own native music is built on the pantonic scale.
It consists of weird tunes in a minor key that are plain-
tive, sad and tremulous. They use the harp, and make 534
crude instruments resembling the violin out of bamboo,
and a kind of xylophone played with two small mallets.
The drum is also used in various forms.

The educated Karens, most of whom are Christians, 533
have almost entirely abandoned their old plaintive native 177 ●
airs for the happier Western music. It began with the
hymns of the Christian Church of which a fine and large
collection has been translated into both the Sgaw and Pwo
languages, and which they delight to sing. In addition to
these, the young people love picking up the popular airs
sung in musicales and in the cinemas. It is not uncommon
to hear these songs even in remote villages.

During the past quarter century there has grown up
a new music among the people, mostly among the
Christians. Every Christian village has its choir. They
love to sing together. The leaders of these choirs have
taken Western airs and have combined them with touches
of their native music and composed new songs for them.
Hundreds of these have been published by mimeograph
and a few of them have shown real musical ability on the
part of their composers. The Karens have, as a rule, soft
and velvety voices that lend themselves to good music.

533 Trained choirs have sung in the cities before exacting
• 177 audiences and have won praise. Because of their former
experiences of being subjected to exploitation, they have
taken to the American Negro spirituals and sing them
with a great deal of expression. Here again they have
adapted some of these to their own life and composed new
tunes and songs to fit their own conditions. Probably the
suffering of these war years will further develop their folk
music.

173 To the Karen the golden age was in the dim past. It
183 was the old men who were wise. They say: "The gene-
ration gone before had wisdom. Now we are but children.
Therefore the customs that have come down to us are
sacred and cannot be broken without great danger."

They are hedged about with taboos many of which
they hold so tenaciously that they are still more or less
in the grip of their fears; and while this lasts progress
will be slow if not almost impossible. Those who made
the big break and became Christians have a different
attitude and yet, even with them, the old customs have
not entirely lost their hold.

343 Their fear of change prevents improved methods of
183 living. This is especially true in the hills where for un-
told generations they have followed the *taung-ya* (moun-
tain cultivation). This involved the sacrifice of a fresh
piece of forest each year for their rice fields. When urged
to adopt a more economic method, such as terracing or
rotation of crops, they would reply that their fathers and
grandfathers grew rice by this method, and being poor
ignorant Karens they could not do any differently.

621 the chief, often his own relatives, would remain in the village. This refers to those sections where the Karens were left to themselves.

621 Under the settled conditions brought about by the
● 177 British Government things remained about the same. The headman was recognized as the seat of authority by the Government, but still the Karens themselves retained their own independent spirit and followed him only by consent. However, since it has required the permission of the Government to set up a new village site there has been less splitting of villages. In some cases there has been a revival of the old Burmese office of *Taikh-thugyi* or Collector of Revenue for a section comprising several villages. In such cases the local headman has been relieved of the collection of the taxes in the area.

563 The exploitation of the Karens by the Burmans in
663 the days of Burmese rule was chiefly by the forcing of
186 unrequited labour in building walls, digging canals, etc., and the general rough treatment they received when they ventured into the towns. They were shown to be unwelcome by having the dogs set upon them. Such treatment resulted in a great deal of racial antagonism on the part of the Karens towards their more powerful neighbours. This prevented closer relations between the villages which were located in the same section. It made the Karens more exclusive, keeping them within their own tribe, and causing them to refuse to mix with the Burmans.

621 However, under British rule, and with the greater
177 protection that has come to the Karens from it, the Government has established village tracts which comprise several hamlets under one headman. In such cases the Karens

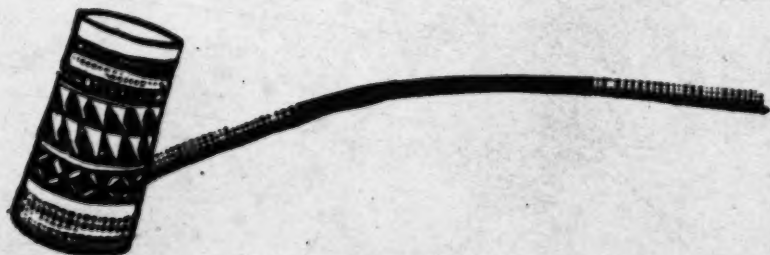
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have come under the Burman official and formed a single unit in his jurisdiction, and on the whole have received just treatment. In some cases, a Karen of standing and influence has been chosen as the headman and has had Burmese villages under his control. In this way Karens have risen to power over those who formerly looked down upon them. 621 177 ●

There has usually been a strong national self-consciousness among the Karens. They long for the freedom which they feel would come if they had a Karen king and were out from under the rule of the Burmese and even, in a small degree, of the British. The "prophets" who have led various revival movements among them have had something of a combined political and spiritual freedom in mind although the former has been kept more or less camouflaged. One of those, who seemed to be a sort of Quisling before the Japanese invasion, was talking about the coming of a Karen king to take over the country. But those who heeded him were only a small handful of the more primitive Karens in the Toungoo Hills and those in some of the more remote parts of the Irrawaddy Delta. 186 668

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ATTITUDE TO THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

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Whenever the Karens have had an opportunity they have shown their loyalty to the British Government. They have a deep sense of gratitude for the security that has come with a settled and orderly government. This has allowed them to emerge from their hilly recesses, clear tracts of land on the more fertile plains, and build villages of more permanent construction than the flimsy bamboo structures that they built in the mountains when they had to move every two years. Here they could raise buffaloes and cattle and have reasonable protection against forays and marauders. Open exploitation by the Burmese was curbed if not entirely stopped.

During the first Burmese War in 1826 they served as guides for the English expedition against Ava and were commended for their good faith by Major Snodgrass in his "Narrative of the Burmese War". After the war they turned to the American missionaries for education, but they were forbidden to have any contact with the foreigners because the Burmese king and his Government feared the influence of intruders. They were prohibited from visiting their teachers even as late as 1851, when the Burmese Viceroy in Rangoon threatened to shoot instantly the first Karen he should find capable of reading.

In the Second Burmese War in 1852 they led the attacking forces of the British through jungle paths up to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, which was then the strongest military citadel near Rangoon, to attack it successfully from the rear.

The Burmese knew the desire of the Karens for

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freedom which would come from a change in Govern- 177 ●
ment, and they inflicted cruel vengeance upon them, burn- 563
ing their villages within a fifty mile radius of Rangoon, 175
and putting men, women and children to death in bar- 701
barous ways. This caused large migrations from the [166]
territory under the Burmese king to Tenasserim and
Arakan which were under British rule. Even here there
were frequent miscarriages of justice, for they had to con-
tend against subordinate Burmese officers who still tried
to prevent them from gaining more prestige.

After the Third Burmese War in 1885 Karen levies
were raised to assist the British. They did excellent work
in the pacification of the country where former Burmese
soldiers roamed and robbed at will. For assistance in
putting down this terror the Karens received scant reward.
In fact, many Karens, who with Government permission
and their own money had purchased guns for the defence
of the country, had them forcibly confiscated because of
the unfounded suspicion of their scheming neighbours who
resented their rising recognition.

During World War I many Karens were enrolled in
the armed services and proved themselves capable and
loyal wherever they were called to serve, whether in
Mesopotamia, Egypt, or for guard duty in India and
the Malay States.

During the Burmese Rebellion under "Saya San" in
1930, in the Tharrawaddy District, the Karens made
valuable contributions to the putting down of the in-
surrection and many of them received honours for their
good work at the Durbar in Rangoon. When Karens
can serve under officers of their own people they are
most happy. They have confidence in British officers but

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often find it difficult to serve under Burman or Indian officers.

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During the rise of the nationalistic movements in Burma, the Karens naturally looked forward to being ruled by their old adversaries without much enthusiasm. They entered into the new government however and played their part as well as could be expected considering their limited opportunity ; by so doing they won the respect of their neighbours to a certain degree and made a contribution to the new regime. In the Cabinets formed under the constitution in force since 1935 there was usually a Karen member who held a portfolio.

As a rule the Karens have exhibited true loyalty to the British Government, but that does not preclude the presence of a few ambitious men who for personal gain have taken the part of Quislings in the present war. Although they happened to be in rather important positions they had only a small following, mostly of ignorant and self-seeking people, and were entirely in opposition to the general attitude of the Karens throughout the country.

In World War II the work of the Karens has been most evident. They occupy important positions in the army and in other services and have done excellent work. If we can believe rumours that have come from Burma, they are undergoing a great deal of suffering not only from the Japanese but from the large number of 'bad hats' who even in peaceful times are always ready to seize an opportunity of easy loot.

The position of minorities has always been difficult. The lot of the Karens has not been harder than that of many other small groups who have had different charac-

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teristics and lived under more powerful neighbouring tribes or peoples whether in Europe, Asia, Africa, or even America. It is hoped that better relations may grow out of the common suffering of this present conflict. This applies to the attitude of the minority as well as to that of the majority. [276]



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XI

PROGRESS

Very few races or tribes of people have made greater progress in a century and a quarter than have the Karens in Burma. When we think of their wild state, their unhealthy ways, their lack of knowledge, their fear of strangers and their hesitancy in changing their old accepted ways, their primitive agriculture and crude villages, we can hardly realize that some of the refined, educated, well-dressed and cultured people that we have known come from such unlikely ancestry. The "wild cattle of the hills" have indeed turned out to be what they called themselves, *Pga K' Nyaw*, which actually means "men".

One of the greatest contributing factors in helping them to throw off their fears and rid themselves of the fetters of stagnating customs was their accepting the releasing power of the Christian religion. This opened their

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177 minds and stimulated their smouldering desires for edu-
 797 tion so that they could read the Book which had been
 brought to them by their "Younger White Brother", the
 177 missionary. Schools were opened and at the beginning
 871 were attended by persons of all ages from young children
 797 to ambitious gray-haired men and women.

These schools grew in number and in standard of instruction until, within fifty years of the baptism of the first Karen into the Christian Church, a school of collegiate standing was demanded. For many years it was customary to call the school, which at the time of the invasion was a part of Rangoon University known as Judson College, the "Karen College". In fact, the tramway tickets of the Rangoon Electric and Tramway Company were so printed until after the college was transferred to Kokine when the University moved to its present site.

So great was the desire for schools among the Christian Karens, who presented a marked contrast to their non-Christian neighbours of the same race, that they early met the cost of instruction and, in most cases, of the buildings in which their children were taught. This was especially true in Bassein District. Other centres of Karen education and church activity were Rangoon, where they owned their own extensive mission compound in the Sanchaung quarter, and Moulmein at Daingwunkwin, and in Shwegyin, Henzada, Tavoy and Toungoo. Later Nyaunglebin, Tharrawaddy, Loikaw, Maubin (for Pwos) and Insein became centres of activity and influence.

177 The broadening of their mental outlook has brought
 795 about many changes in their lives and in their thinking. A number of indigenous cults have arisen as a result of this stimulation. The conflict between their native reli-

PROGRESS

37

gious ideas and Buddhism and Christianity has led some 177
to try to make syntheses of these various teachings. So- 795
called "prophets" have tried to set themselves up as
leaders in these developments. But none of them has
made a very lasting impression on the people as a whole.
Of these the Klibopah and the Ko San Ye movements
were probably the most important. The remnants of the
latter group have their centre in a large village, Padoplaw,
near Nyaunglebin. One of the sons of a former leader,
Saw Johnson Po Min, led them into an atheistic movement
from which came some of those who were of uncertain
loyalty at the time of the Japanese invasion. As compared
with the large body of Karens who were unitedly loyal
to the government and the religion in which they had
found strength, they were a very small group.

Many Karens who qualified as teachers left their own 177
homes and went as pioneers to Upper Burma, and to the 875
outlying tribes such as the Chins, Kachins, Shans, 563
Lahus, and Yawyins and, fired with unselfish zeal, have
given their lives for what is really missionary work in
preaching and teaching these tribes. During the Third
Burmese War, when American missionaries had to leave
the Kachin country, these Karen teachers stayed on and
did effective work in laying the foundations for a new
regime among them.

The development of education among the Karens 177
helped to produce books to take the place of the old oral 538
bard literature. In the beginning many of these books 204
were written by the missionaries; but as time went on
there grew up Karens who had a desire to contribute to
the growth of their people and these have written a number
of very acceptable works. In 1841 a newspaper in Karen,

177 called "The Morning Star", was established by Dr. Mason
538 in Tavoy. This was the oldest vernacular newspaper in
204 Burma, with a continuous history up to the time its
publication was stopped by the Japanese occupation.
It was cut off when it was about to celebrate its centenary.

177 The Karens were carrying on work of research,
875 medical practice, and other scientific branches in which
they were showing real ability. There were Karen lec-
turers in the University.

177 The churches established by the missionaries had
794 become self-supporting. No money was being paid from
871 America for regular church work among the Karens, with
the exception of grants for a few schools and for pioneer-
ing work among outlying tribes. They had their own
associational organizations in which the churches of a
district were combined and the stronger made contribu-
tions to help the weaker, to support their Theological
Training School at Insein, to maintain town schools which
were conducted with boarding departments for the benefit
of the whole district, and to subsidize evangelistic work
in distant places.

177 The Baptist churches among the Karens combined
795 with the churches of other peoples in Burma to form the
Burma Baptist Convention. Their annual meetings were
often attended by as many as three or four thousand dele-
gates and were sources of inspiration as well as opportu-
nities to plan for further work. The Karens shared the
honours of president and officers with Burmans and others.
Among other churches such as the Anglican and Roman
Catholic which conducted work among the Karens, they
had their conferences and carried on their work according
to the genius of their own church.

The organization of the Baptist churches has been an important factor in developing a sense of responsibility among the Karens and an understanding of the principles of self-government, even though there may still be much for them to learn. 177 ● 795

Even a casual observer will notice the great difference between the Karens who have become Christians and those who have either remained in their own animism or even become Buddhists. The difference in the appearance of their villages may not be so striking but officers have often remarked to me that the Christian villagers have a different air, they are a little more cleanly, have their schools and are better clothed. They also have a much lower crime record. Their young people branch out into better positions and become more prosperous. 184 795

The villages that remain animistic are still held in the slavery of their taboos and their mentality remains static. The village life remains unchanged. Custom is their master. Progress is considered dangerous. Education is not encouraged. If they do go to school it is to the Buddhist monastery, if there happens to be one. In some cases however ambitious children demand to go to the Christian schools and branch out into progressive ways which they learn there.

During the last quarter century there has been a movement among the animistic Karens who do not become Christian to turn to the Buddhist culture and religion. This is partly due to the movement to make Buddhism the national religion of the country and to try to win all the inhabitants to its practices, and partly due to the fact that the Buddhist culture is superior to the original Karen way of life. In turning away from their ancient 177 795

- 177 beliefs and practices they take hold of that which is nearest
795 to them. But in so doing, it must be acknowledged, they find themselves still bound by many fears which Buddhism has not enabled them to throw off. What progress has been made has been very slow.

The release of their minds from the thralldom of superstition and from the fear of breaking with old customs of which we have spoken, together with the security from attack afforded them by the British Government have contributed to help the Karens to become one of the most hopeful elements in the population of Burma. They can be counted upon to make good use of the opportunities which it is expected will come to them in the rehabilitation of the country when the present war is over.



Torch stand

HABITAT AND TRIBAL DISTRIBUTION

running northward from Thaton into the Shan States beyond Taunggyi. 101/197

The Bwe tribes are found in the vicinity of Toungoo, in the territory extending from the foothills east of that city throughout the Karenni subdivision. This is a very mountainous region, and we find the people broken up into small tribes differing from one another in dialect, dress, and customs. Nine of these tribes were enumerated in the last Government census. The tendency of the present time is to consider these tribes more closely related than was formerly the case.

In the *Census Report* of the Government of India for the year 1911 we have the first enumeration of all Karens in the British territory. In former reports the Karenni territory was not included in the enumeration. The returns in 1911 showed a population of 1,102,695. This was an increase of 199,334 over the previous count in 1901, due in part to the increased extent of the territory covered. The enumeration, however, did not clearly distinguish between the Pwo and Sgaw branches of the race, due, as the *Report* says, to the fact that many returned themselves simply as Karens, without specifying to which branch they belonged. The total number of Pwos and Sgaws increased from 717,859 souls in 1901 to 872,825 in 1911, a gain of 154,966. This represents a real increase in population, for these tribes are all in Burma proper. The Pwo dialect is less persistent than the Sgaw, for more of its members are using Burmese to a much greater degree than the Sgaws, although the latter are also giving up their language where they are living in close contact with the Burmans. The Sgaw dialect is not "driving out the Pwo" as rumor says, but is merely holding its own better against the Burmese. Probably there are about half a million Sgaws in Burma and perhaps another 50,000 in Siam,² which would make them the most numerous branch of the race. The Taungthu were enumerated by themselves and, as has been said above, belong to the Pwo group. There were 183,054 of them in 1911. During the decade previous to that enumeration they had made an increase of 14,753 souls. The Pwo group would probably include altogether about 350,000 members and would stand second in point of numbers. 161/101 [197] [177]

¹ W. A. Graham, in the *Handbook of Siam*, estimates the Karens of that country at 20,000, but I think this estimate rather low.

² These citations are all from the *Census of India, 1911, Vol. IX, pp. 271, 2.*

MENTAL AND MORAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KAREN 29

The Karen have been addicted to the use of liquor. Their feasts and religious observances have been occasions for drinking. It is reported that the Brechs are accustomed to store their grain in two bins, one (often the larger one) for that of which liquor is to be made, and the other for that which is to be used as food. On the plains I have not found the Karen greater drinkers than their neighbors. With the decay of the old rites and the spread of Christianity the evil seems to be on the decline. Among the members of the Baptist churches, however it may be in the other denominations, total abstinence is enjoined.

The Karen are lovers of music. In the early days they accompanied the chanting of their poems on their primitive harps and other instruments. The people of the Pegu Yomas, Tenasserim, in the delta of the Irrawaddy, have interesting tunes, which have been in use from the olden times. In other districts they have contented themselves with the rhythm of chanting and moaning, melodies being conspicuous by their absence. The Maw Lay and other religious sects have had their own songs, which may be said to correspond to Christian hymns. With the introduction of Christianity came the music of the Western hymn-book, and to this the Karen have taken with their whole hearts. They love to sing and do not grow weary of it, however late the hour. Occidental music has taken such a hold on those who have become Christians that they have almost entirely given up their native music. A few hymns are sometimes sung to adaptations of their old tunes; but they prefer the Western melodies, and few of the young people know any other. They learn the new tunes readily and are able to sing glees and anthems by ear after a moderate amount of practice. Their voices are much softer than those of the Burmese and blend well in choruses. Some of the young women have very sweet voices, which seldom become harsh and rasping. While traveling in the hill country I was delighted one evening with the sweet voice of a young woman, which came floating up from the stream where she was drawing water. She was singing an old "hta" or poem, while I listened unobserved behind a clump of bamboos. No sooner did I step into the open than she ceased, and I could not persuade her to continue the song.

One discovers but few indications of a love of beauty among the Karen. They make little attempt to ornament their houses or their implements, so that the evidence of their possessing a sense

THE KAREN PEOPLE OF BURMA

531 of color and design is practically limited to the woven patterns of
531 some of their garments. They have only a scant vocabulary for
192 colors. I have seldom heard them remark on the beauty of a sunset
or the glories of a sunrise. Sometimes they have called attention
to a pleasing landscape, but I have wondered whether they were
not doing so because they knew of my pleasure in such scenes.

571 The Karen is a plebeian. His manners at home are crude, al-
609 though he is not without a certain personal dignity. His shy-
ness in the presence of strangers, especially of those whom he
fears, causes him embarrassment. Under such circumstances he
often impresses one as being impolite. He is not servile. It has
[554] never been his custom to "shiko".² The greatest chief is a comrade
among his men, who do not yield their self-respect in his presence.
Nevertheless, the inherent timidity of the race shows itself in the
avoidance of making a request in person. A request may expose
the one making it to the chagrin of a refusal and the one addressed
to the unpleasant necessity of giving an adverse answer. The Karen,
therefore, gets a friend to act as his intermediary. Even a boy who
wants to buy a book will have his classmate get it for him.

152 Amiability is another marked trait of the Karen, both of the
177 educated and the uneducated, rendering them acceptable in many
462 kinds of service. Young Karen women are in demand as nurse-
maids all over Burma, and not a few have gone temporarily to
England and America in that capacity. They are kind, patient, and
faithful in their care of the children entrusted to their care.

000 The remarkable chastity of the Karen is also worthy of notice.
It has, however, been mentioned in several places in this work
and perhaps need not be discussed further in this connection, except
to say that the fear of the evil consequences of violating the laws
of the elders has kept them free from many unhealthy customs
that are found in many parts of the world.⁴

² "Shiko" is a Burmese word signifying the act of worship, or of showing respect to officials.

⁴ See pages 139, 142, 192, 288.

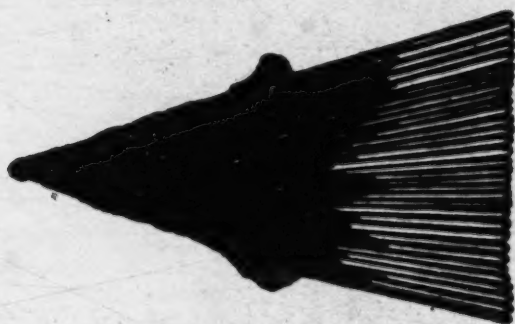
DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

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at the bottom. The Red Karen, who take their name from their red garments, wear short breeches of red cotton and a short close-fitting tunic of the same color. These soon become the color of dirt from the generous accretions of that substance which adhere to them. These people use a blanket, which is red and white striped when new. They discard both the tunic and blanket in warm weather. Cotton is the most common material used, but in Toungoo silk is often used, either alone or with the cotton. [291]

In Lower Burma, on the plains, it has become customary for the men to wear Burmese garments. The only time they put on their Karen garments, if they have them, is when they hold their "Bgba" feast. The different tribes to the east wear the Shan costume, with more or less variation, all the way to the Chinese Border. [296]

The Karen men knot up their long hair on the top of the head or over the right or left ear, according to the custom of their par- [177]



A KAREN BAMBOO COMB

ticular locality, fastening it with a small triangular bamboo comb. No other head-dress is worn, except a piece of white muslin or other light-weight cloth, which may be put over the head as a turban or around it like a fillet, unless one should include the ornamental head-bands of the Karenni youth who, before marriage, wear necklaces of stones that have been handed down from father to son for generations, and ornaments for the head, neck, and ears, consisting of mother-of-pearl buttons interspersed with the shining wings of beautiful green beetles. All these are, however, given up at marriage and become the property of the bride. [302]

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THE KAREN PEOPLE OF BURMA

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177 In the matter of adopting foreign dress the women are more conservative than the men. Long after every man in a village has taken on the Burmese costume, the women continue to wear their characteristic black smock over their Burmese jacket and "longyi" (skirt).

291 The Sgaw and Pwo women, after arriving at the age of puberty, wear a smock ("hse") and a shirt ("ni"). Little girls wear a single "hse," falling from their neck to their ankles, at least when it is new. In some villages they wear a white "hse," without any ornament or color, but in other places they wear a black garment ornamented with colored yarns at the neck and around the armholes. In some localities the maidens wear the long white "hse," reaching to the ankles, until they are married; but it is more common for them to put on the skirt and wear a shorter "hse" at about the time they arrive at maturity.

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773
286 The women's dress varies from one tribe to another, and in some instances each village has its particular weave. There is considerable general similarity of the Karen designs to those in the Malay countries, in Borneo, and in the Philippines; but the particular Karen design, among the Sgaw women at least, is that supposed to be derived from the python. The story is that "Naw Mu E," one of the mythical characters of ancient times, was kidnapped by a fabulous White Python and carried off to his den. Later, her husband, hearing of her plight, came and rescued her by sacrificing himself at the mouth of the den, whereupon the woman was released and enabled to return to the upper earth again. Various versions of the story exist, one of which is that she was compelled by the python to weave patterns on its skin that still remain, but on being released showed her contempt for it by weaving skirts for herself of the same pattern, thus giving it the gravest insult she could inflict. This pattern soon became general among Karen women.

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286 Other patterns, of which there are many, are called by various names, as seeds, little pagodas, cowries, etc. Especially beautiful is the pattern or weave worn by the Mopgha women, which consists of a variety of figures in magenta, yellow, and green on a black ground. I have been told that the weaving of the designs for these skirts has become a lost art, none of the young women of the few villages of the Mopgha tribe having learned to weave these garments. The Bwe women usually wear a black "ni" or skirt with

CHAPTER VIII

THE KAREN VILLAGE-HOUSE

361
● [177] The Karen on the plains live in houses of Burmese construction,
342 which are therefore outside the scope of this work. In the Pegu Hills we find the single-structure village, which seems to have been the characteristic Karen dwelling from early times. It might be described as a bamboo apartment-house on stilts, accommodating on the average from twenty to thirty families. It is spread out on one floor, and each family occupies not one "flat" but a room, called in Karen "deu," which faces a central corridor running the length of the barrack.

Such a village, "th' waw," is usually rebuilt on a new site each year. The new location is sought by the local chief during the hot season, after conference with the elders and after the crops have been brought in. The place selected by the chief is fairly level, adjacent to the area to be cut over the coming year, and near a spring or stream that will not dry up during the hot weather. In the old days it was also necessary to choose a site that would be high and easily defended against raids. Before the decision is [78'] finally made, the chief must consult the auspices in the form of chicken bones, and if these are propitious and no laughing-bird (*Lanius*) calls "chet, chet," the men begin to cut bamboos with which to construct the village.

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313 The bamboos selected for posts are twenty or more feet long and usually from four to six inches in diameter. They are set in the ground at intervals of four or five cubits (six to seven and a half feet). Holes are chopped through these large uprights at a height of from six to eight feet above the ground, and pins are thrust through on which bamboo girders of the same size are fastened by means of withes. At right angles to these girders and resting on them, other bamboo poles, slightly smaller in size, are tied at regular intervals of about a cubit to form the floor joists. The floor is made of large bamboos, split, flattened out, and secured to the joists by means of withes of the same material. It is six or eight feet above the ground, springy, and seamed with cracks, through which rubbish and wash water may be disposed of. As

THE KAREN VILLAGE-HOUSE

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of, the two front poles of the fireplace a little way above the floor serves as a holder for the bamboo stick kept for stirring the cooking rice or other foods.

A smaller box of ashes in the center of the room supplies a fireplace for the warming of the family when the air is chilly of nights and mornings. It is then comfortable to sit about the fire, as one visits and tells stories.

The Karen have little use for artificial light. They get up with the sun and go to bed with the chickens. Often the flaring light of the bamboo fuel in the fireplace serves for light, while they entertain visitors or do odd bits of belated work. When they need something more than this, they use a cup containing crude earth-oil (petroleum is found in large quantities in Upper Burma) with a wick sticking out, or they make torches from the resinous oil of the "xaw" (*Dipterocarpus*) tree. These enormous trees when



A TORCH WITH ITS STAND

tapped yield a good run of oil. After each run of sap they scorch the hole and get another run. The oil is mixed with bits of dry wood or punk and moulded into sticks about a cubit long and an inch in diameter by putting it into joints of small bamboo. When it has dried, it is wrapped in palm or pineapple leaves and tied up with bark fibre. When needed for use, one end is loosened and applied to the

fireplace for lighting. It is then set on a rough stand fashioned out of wood, on which it rests in an oblique position and in this manner burns to the best advantage. Nowadays little tin lamps made by Burmese tinsmiths after the pattern of the old European lamps are in common use. These hold a cotton wick and give a little light and some smoke, as they have no chimneys.

Usually beyond the cooking place a small partition extends out about four feet from the wall, forming a little alcove and hiding from view the family sleeping-room. The latter is a small apartment not more than eight or ten feet each way and is supplied with either a few rush mats, such as the Burmans are in the habit

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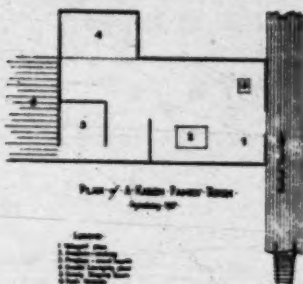
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THE KAREN PEOPLE OF BURMA

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of sleeping on, or a single large bamboo mat, besides a quantity of old clothes, blankets, pillows, and rags scattered about or hanging from the rough ends of the walls. At either the front or back of the large outer room, whichever is toward the east—the place of honor in a Karen house—is a raised platform called the “hso hko.” This is about a cubit’s height from the floor and has a mat on it worn shiny with much sitting. It is the place where guests are received,

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especially if they are people of note. Here against the wall are a few pillows, which may be half-round bamboos of giant size, that is, from eight to ten inches in diameter, or cloth pillows filled with fibre from the cotton tree (*Bombax heterophylla*). The guest is invited to sit on the platform and to partake of the contents of the fragrant betel-box, which is sure to

[854]

be hospitably pushed in front of him. The cradle usually hangs from the crossbeams in the middle of the room, being held up by fibre ropes, although occasionally elephant chains are called into use to give full measure of security. The cradle itself may be a blanket swung up at the four corners, or it may be part of the trunk of a large hollow tree. A basket-work cradle is scarcely ever found in old Karen homes.

343

At the back of the family apartment the bamboo joists and flooring project several feet beyond the wall, forming a primitive back veranda where clothes are hung to dry; rice (paddy), fish, fruit, and vegetables are set out in the sun, and other domestic operations are carried on in private.

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In a few Karen villages a young men’s club-room (“blaw”) is still maintained, but not in most. Where such a room exists, it does not differ in general appearance from a family-room, except that it has no partitions. The hearth in the middle of the space serves as a social fireside on cold mornings and evenings. At the east end a raised dais extends the width of the room, being used both for reception and for sleeping purposes. Guests, unless closely related to some family in the village, usually sleep here, except when, as a mark of respect, they are invited to sleep in a room apart on the “hso hko” with the men of the house. Women guests sleep in the family sleeping-room together with the women folk and children.

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The old type of Karen village-house, such as we have been describing above, is being modified by contact with the Burmese

THE KAREN VILLAGE-HOUSE

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way of building, and every stage of evolution from the village-bar-rack to separate family houses may be observed in Karen villages to-day. (See the illustrations on pages 94, 220, and 227.)

When an epidemic breaks out in a bamboo village-house, the inhabitants are not held there by the considerations that ordinarily prevent the dwellers in durable towns and cities from taking their prompt departure. At best the Karen village-house is habitable only for a year or two, was built by the combined efforts of the men of the little community from material of which the supply is abundant, and can be replaced quickly. When, therefore, disease begins to spread among the adjacent families, they scatter to the four winds with their most necessary belongings. Soon they gather and build another village on a new site and, having removed the last of their possessions from the old infected structure, leave it to decay or set it on fire.

When a village community is removing from one site to another, the women prepare food and liquor for the journey, pack up their belongings and leave them in the jungle near the path, if they do not wish to take them to the new place at once, and, finally, prepare the offerings to be left behind. These offerings consist of four balls of cooked rice, one white, another made black by being mixed with charcoal, and the other two colored red and yellow, respectively, by the admixture of colored pigments. These balls are placed on a large winnowing-sieve that has been woven by the women for the purpose at the very last. This tray and its offerings are carried to the central part of the house, where it is visited and spat upon by every member of the village. They then repeat the following lines:

"Let all sickness and pain depart. Depart all colds.
Go eat your black rice, your red rice.
Go eat your betel and its leaves.
Go eat with your wife and your children.
Go stay in your house."

After thus addressing the spirits, the villagers take up their burdens, beat their drums and gongs, and set out for their new abode—a sight, indeed, for a motion picture camera.

On arriving at the new house, they do not enter it at once, but wait until some one has plucked from adjacent trees seven twigs growing upright, and with these has swept out the rooms. As the sweeper goes through the house he repeats the following incantation:

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FOOD AND ITS PREPARATION

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Inasmuch as rice is the chief article of diet among the Karen, a few words should be said about its preparation. "Paddy," which is the grain before it has been cleaned for cooking, is brought home from the bins in which it has been stored and spread out on mats to dry in the sun. It is then pounded in mortars to rub off the outer husk. A second pounding removes the inner skin covering each grain and polishes the rice pure white. (See p. 68.) As cleaned rice does not keep as well as paddy, the natives pound out only enough to last a week or two. The kernels are washed in a basket with a sieve-like bottom and are then poured into a pot of boiling water. They are allowed to cook vigorously for ten minutes or less, until they swell and become soft enough to crush easily between the thumb and finger. The water is then poured off and the pot set back in the hot ashes to dry out any remaining water. When the rice is served, it remains whole, firm, and slightly hard. Soft boiled rice is most unpalatable to the Karen, who think it not so sustaining as the less cooked cereal. Nowadays the cooking is done in most places in earthen pots, which are bought from Burmese or Shan traders. These pots are of red unglazed clay, cost but a few annas, (one anna is equal to about two cents or an English penny), and last with care for some time.

Besides the rice used for ordinary meals there are many varieties of glutinous rice that are cooked or steamed on the plains for an early morning meal or for special feasts. The steamers are made like the Burmese pots, but with a number of small holes in the bottom. These are placed over vessels of boiling water, the steam of which rises through the openings and permeates the grain. I have been told that when a rare feast is desired, the rice is steamed over a vessel in which a chicken is boiling, and the rice becomes flavored with the fowl. Steamed glutinous rice is sometimes mixed with sessimum seeds and pounded in a mortar until it becomes a sticky paste. This mixture is called "to me to pi."

It is reported that long ago, before the Karen had as much dealing with the Burmese as they do now, they cooked their rice in joints of bamboo. At any rate, this is their present practice when out in the forest. The hunter or wayfarer in the jungle puts his rice into a large joint of bamboo, which he stands at the edge of a little fire until the contents are sufficiently boiled. The hard silicious sheathing of the bamboo easily withstands the heat of a single cooking. Once used, the joint is thrown away, for there are plenty more to be cut as occasion demands. Sometimes cooked rice

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262 on them. Meat in excess of immediate needs is cut into narrow
 252 strips and dried on a rack over a fire. The strips are then covered
 with salt and stored away for future use. Fish are dried in the
 same way. Such preserved foods are eaten by the workers in the
 fields or help to furnish forth the repasts on a journey. In the
 ● [177] hills, so far as I have observed, the Karen does not fry his food;
 but on the plains, where he has more or less taken up Burmese
 [827] ways, cooking food in fat has become somewhat common. This is
 usually done outside the house, however, because the Karen, like
 the Burmese and Shan, have a superstitious fear of the smell of
 cooking.

462 While cooking is preeminently the women's work, it seems that
 252 nearly every man can cook and does on occasion prepare his own
 food. I have eaten many a tasty meal prepared by Karen men, who
 considerably took pains to have clean utensils and to use only such
 condiments as they knew white men were likely to relish.

264 The serving of food among the Karen is a simple matter. The
 rice is emptied into a tray, the meats or vegetables are put in little
 bowls, and all are set on a mat on the floor. The members of the
 household squat around this "family board" and eat with the hand.
 They pour gravy from the meat, fish, or other side-dishes on the
 rice, work it in with the fingers, and convey the food in compact
 lumps to their mouths. Among the more primitive large plantain
 leaves often serve as trays and plates. The Karen on the plains
 use separate dishes of china or enamel-ware, which are readily
 obtained in the bazaar. These are set on a low table, standing no
 more than six inches above the floor. This manner of serving is in
 vogue among the Burmese. There is not much sociability about a
 Karen meal. Each person attends to his eating until he has finished,
 when he rises, rinses off his hands, quenches his thirst with a drink
 of water, and withdraws to sit down, or leaves the house without
 formality. The members of a family generally eat together; but
 if guests are present, the women usually wait until the men are
 served. Large quantities of food are prepared for wedding and
 funeral-feasts, which, as a rule, the men and women partake of
 separately without particular order or arrangement.

372
 [177] The safety-match is nowadays the common means employed by
 Karens in producing fire; but formerly the flint and steel were used,
 as they were all over the world in the early days of the nine-
 teenth century and before. A simpler, and probably indigenous,
 method was by the friction of two dry pieces of bamboo. One

AGRICULTURAL PURSUITS AND OTHER OCCUPATIONS 87

duce and luggage from the town into the hill-country or to trading centers. They cover long distances, and before the recent war they received about eight annas (about twenty-four cents) a day for such work. In a few villages they raise oxen, which they train as pack-animals to carry grain and other produce of the hills to Toun-goo or other markets. With two baskets slung on either side of a rough pack-saddle, these oxen can carry not more than one hundred and fifty or two hundred pounds each. 482 492

Karen men are experts at catching and training elephants and often become most excellent drivers for these intelligent beasts. Several travelers testify that Karen drivers seemed to be more gentle with, and careful of, their elephants than Burman drivers and acknowledge the pleasure which they derived from seeing the Karens handle their charges. Owners of elephants are usually employed by the Government Forest Department to draw logs out of the jungle to the streams, by the current of which they are floated down during the rainy season. This is a lucrative business, but the risk involved is large, because the elephants often sicken and need attention to restore them to working condition. [313] 492

In some localities forest officers have employed Karens living in the hills to tend the adjacent forest reserves. But the Karen has a distaste for steady work under supervision, especially if the immediate overseer is a Burman. The latter usually does not hesitate to exhibit his feeling of superiority and to appropriate an undue share of the rewards. Only in a few instances have I known satisfactory results to be obtained through such an arrangement; but the few officers who did secure satisfactory results had a good word to speak for the Karen. 461

ON THE PLAINS

The Karen on the plains in Burma practice methods of cultivation like those of the Burmese, which have often been described. When the rainy season is about to begin in May the cultivator, if his land is at a distance from the village, carries thither a few bamboos and some thatch and builds a hut in his field. Here he lives during the cultivating season. The rains having softened the hard clay soil, he may resort to the very primitive practice of driving a few cattle or buffaloes around over a muddy place until they cut the ground with their sharp hoofs and thus prepare it, after a fashion, to receive the seedlings. Or he may use the method of 243 [177] [342]

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No one can presume to predict the outcome of the present unsettled conditions. We can only hope that better days are in store for the cultivators, whether Burman or Karen.

If, before the war, a man owned his field and cattle without encumbrance or other debts, he could till some twenty acres and make a comfortable living for himself and family. If, however, he was under the necessity of borrowing money and hiring men and cattle, he could hardly keep his head above water.

There are some Karens who own large fields. They may have acquired them by careful management, by purchase, or by foreclosing loans. Many of these proprietors make a business of hiring out their fields to men who cultivate them at a rental of from ten to fifteen baskets of paddy per acre, the cultivator supplying his own materials and help. In case the owner has oxen, he rents them at the usual price. In addition, he usually makes a loan of cash to his tenant, on which he gets a big return, namely, a hundred baskets of paddy for the sum of fifty rupees for six months. If the tenant borrows from a money-lender, he has to pay anywhere from fifteen to fifty percent a year for it.

On the plains the cultivator is almost entirely dependent on his single crop of paddy. If high water has washed out his first settings, there is not time enough left to raise other produce after the water has disappeared. Under these circumstances they sometimes plant sesame, but it requires only a little less time to mature than paddy. The lack of water in the dry season renders cultivation impossible without extensive irrigation.

Along the river-bottoms may be found a few plantain groves, patches of tobacco, sugar-cane, or vegetables; but these are unusual sights. They may add a little to the cultivator's income. But very few persons derive their chief support from such gardens.

The Karen on the plains do not observe the old religious customs of the hill people. Many times they resort to Burmese soothsayers to prognosticate the proper times for planting, reaping, and other tasks. Not a few, however, follow the old ceremonies in greater or less part. A ceremonial similar to "theh a hku" in the hills* is observed on the plains where it is designated "mo a si." It is performed when the paddy is set out. Offerings are seldom seen along the paths in this region, but when the paddy has been winnowed an offering is made to "Hpi Bi Yaw" by transferring the rim of earth around a crab's burrow to the summit of the pile of

* See ante, pp. 78, 79.

AGRICULTURAL PURSUITS AND OTHER OCCUPATIONS 95

paddy. A few paddy heads or even a few leaves of the ginger plant may be inserted in the burrow as a talisman to make the supply of paddy last the year out. The oblation on the threshing-floor or a similar one is then put on top of the paddy in the bin. 243
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The Karen who is untouched by outside influence does not like to take up any other occupation than that of raising paddy. He regards his other pursuits as occasional and accessory, including the gathering of forest products, such as stick-lac and wild honey and the sale of fruit from the few mango trees he may possess. He has not been found satisfactory as a day-laborer or coolie for any continued work; he avoids hiring out as a cartman and does not succeed as a petty trader. In more extensive business he has achieved success in only a few instances. With the advantages of education, however, a few have prospered in commercial life and other callings. Many have entered Government service and risen to positions of trust. A large percentage of those who have passed through the schools are clerks and teachers. One of the largest department stores in Rangoon employs Karen clerks with satisfaction, besides Europeans. Educated Karen girls take employment as teachers and nurse-maids, and recently a few have been engaging in clerical work. 461
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TURNING THE BUFFALOES OUT TO GRAZE
These heavy animals are easily managed by Karen children, but are easily frightened by the presence of strangers. 231

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[177] the Karen are less affected by outside influences, that the use of the drums has been the most prolonged.

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531 There is considerable difference of opinion among the people of the various sections of the country about the classification of the drums. A writer in the *Rangoon Gazette* divides them into two general groups, the older and the later. He regards the older, more melodious, and more highly prized group as comprising those which have four single frogs, snails, or elephants on their heads. He subdivides this group into three divisions, namely, (1) "Klo ka paw," (2) "Klo ma ti," and (3) "Klo gaw ple." The drums in the first of these subdivisions are the oldest and best-sounding. The second general group, comprising the later and poorer drums, may be subdivided, according to this writer, into five classes, which he names as follows: (1) "Raw tear," (2) "Raw la," (3) "Raw ser," (4) "Raw saw," and (5) "Raw boo." These have four sets of double or triple frogs or elephants on their heads. Each class has its characteristic design, for example, ears of paddy supplying the decorative figure on the "Raw boo" and Karen hand-bags that on the "Raw tear."

534 In the Pegu Hills the drums with the single frogs on the head and no figures down the side are known as the "hot" drums, that is, those which are beaten on occasions of death or disaster. The others, with the superimposed frogs and with elephants and snails down the side, are called "cool" drums, these being used on festive occasions. In Toungoo, however, the people do not appear to make the distinction just mentioned, but use both kinds of drums indiscriminately for festive and sad occasions, such as weddings and funerals, respectively.

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782 That the drums are regarded as sacred objects can not be doubted. In the back districts, where the old customs are still perpetuated, offerings are everywhere made to them. I was informed that during the month of March, 1918, a feast was to be held in honor of certain drums in the village of Pyindaing, Tharrawaddy district, and that offerings were to be made to them, the customary period of seven years having elapsed since the last feast and offerings. I held myself in readiness to attend the celebration, but was finally told that the ceremony had been postponed indefinitely. The account in the *Karen Thesaurus* speaks of the offerings as having

* Mr. Po Lin Te in the *Rangoon Gazette* of Sept. 27, 1919. I regret that this writer's article appeared after I had left Burma on my furlough. I have not been able, therefore, to identify the designs mentioned by him on any picture or sketch of the few I have with me or that are accessible to me.

THE KAREN PEOPLE OF BURMA

728 hold of the cup, while they mutually promised to terminate their feud, to intermarry their children, not to destroy each other's property, and to live amicably together unto the third generation. In pledge of these promises each of the twain drank of the cup. Imprecations were then called down upon the head of any one who should renew the feud, and the visiting delegation was dismissed. A shower of arrows was sent after the departing guests, and a salute of muskets was fired in token of the power of the raiders. Sometimes the peace-making water was drunk and the pledges were made under a hardy and well-known tree, on which a notch was cut in testimony of the compact. Dr. Mason in his account of these forays and peace pacts states that the Karen had no monuments other than these notched trees.²

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As already remarked above, the treaty of peace was ratified between the organizer of the victorious raid and the vanquished villagers. The former and his descendants were bound by the compact not to renew the attack; but that did not prevent another foray if a new occasion arose for seeking redress, just as a man in a more advanced community might win a suit against another and be compelled to go to law with him again to settle a fresh dispute. Moreover, the pact did not remove the possibility of another foray being organized by some other inhabitant of the village where the first one originated, for the purpose of revenge on his own account. Thus, it would appear that these treaties were not mere "scraps of paper," and yet they did not suffice to prevent frequent raids. It was not until numbers of the Karen removed to the plains and thus came more closely into contact with a common enemy, the Burmese people, against whom they had to defend themselves, that they seem to have largely given up the killing of one another. I have not been able to find any evidence to show that the Burmese Government exercised its power in suppressing the forays among the Karen, and I think that such private wars decreased in number for the reason just given.

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WEAPONS

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The weapons used by the Karen in their fighting were spears, javelins, swords, and flint-lock and match-lock guns. The crossbow seems not to have been well adapted for warfare and has been kept for hunting. The commonest forms of fighting

² *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XXXVII, Pt. II, p. 161.

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implements were spears and javelins. These were usually made with iron heads either of small bayonet-shape or elongated ellipse-shape sharpened to a point. In the case of the larger spears the head measures about two feet in length and two or three inches across at the widest part of the blade. The shaft of some hard wood is five or six feet long. 44

The *Karen Thesaurus* distinguishes among three kinds of swords or "na," as they are collectively called by the people themselves. One kind is the two-edged sword with a sharp point ("na thweh hko"); the second is a blunt sword shaped like the tail of an eel ("na nya hti meh"), and the third is square at the end and can be used for cutting only ("na xu hko").³ These swords were carried in sheathes of a type similar to those seen among the Shan, formed of two pieces of bamboo held together by rattan bands woven around them. No one knows whether or not these weapons are native with the Karen. They may have been copied from the Shan. Besides the three kinds of swords, the Karen used a long knife ("dah") for both defensive and offensive purposes, which is devoted nowadays to domestic employment.⁴

During the sixteenth century the Portuguese carried on an extensive trade in firearms in the East, especially in Burma. In this way the Karen tribes became familiar with flint-lock and match-lock guns, owning numbers of them. In numerous instances the stock of the gun had no butt to be held against the shoulder, as in the case of European and American guns, but a handle that was held against the cheek. Powder was "pounded out" in a mortar containing sulphur, saltpeter, and charcoal, all native products. The sulphur was often obtained from the deposits of bat dung found in the limestone caves that are numerous in the Moulmein district. Indeed, one of the common names for gun-powder was "bla-e," meaning bat dung. Inasmuch as lead mines have long been known in Burma and on the Chinese border, I presume that the Karen got the material for their bullets from these. When lead was not to be had, they substituted small round stones. 411
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The approaches to the villages were guarded by burying sharpened bamboo spikes, hardened with fire, in the paths, leaving only the point protruding at a sufficient angle to catch the foot of the passer-by. These almost hidden spikes inflicted terrible wounds in 726
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³ For the weapons used in hunting see pp. 104, 2.

⁴ *Karen Thesaurus*, Vol. III, 154; *Cross, Karen-English Dictionary*, 307.

CHAPTER XVII

MUSIC, MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, AND DANCING

KAREN MUSIC

The Karen use the pentatonic or five-toned scale, which has belonged to the Eastern nations since early times. This scale consists of the first, second, third, fifth, and sixth intervals of the modern octave. They appear to know nothing of different musical keys, but in starting a tune try one pitch or another until they have found the range suitable to their voices. They do not keep accurate time in their singing, but hold one or another tone as suits their fancy, introducing quavers on the long notes and sliding down or slurring from one tone to the next. Some words and phrases they repeat over and over again, thereby suggesting the repetitions in an anthem. As they sing in minor strain, their music has a quality of sadness.

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On their instruments they play tunes that are not rendered vocally. This is especially true of the melodies they play on the pipes ("hpi ba"), rather than of set compositions. These pipes are capable of producing really beautiful music, consisting largely of improvised runs and variations, demanding no small skill.¹

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It is to be regretted that, with the acceptance of Christianity, the Karen have almost entirely dropped their own music for that of the West. Hymns particularly appeal to them. Perhaps this is due to their desire to leave their pre-Christian life altogether behind them, as well as to the more animated quality of our Western music. However, a few Karen melodies have been adapted to hymns and have been recently incorporated in their hymnbook through the efforts of the Rev. E. N. Harris, of Toungoo.

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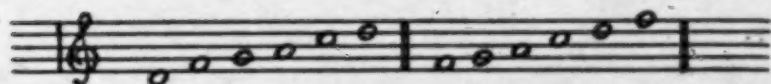
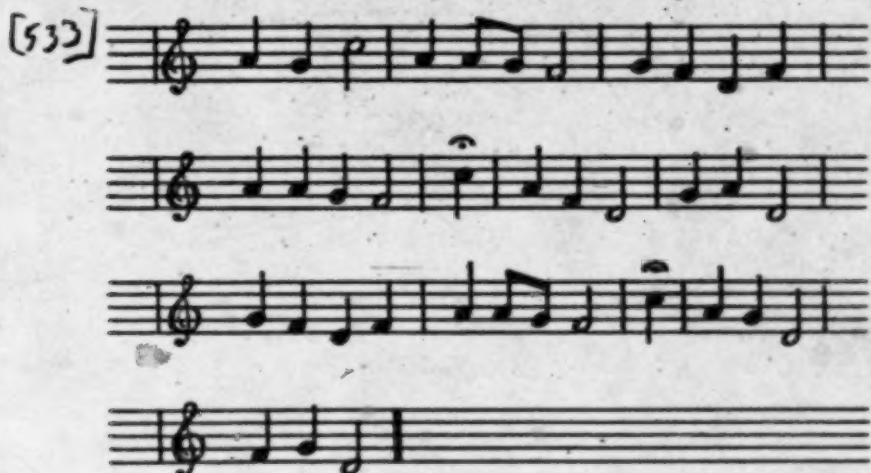
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The Karen have seven or eight primitive musical instruments, besides drums, cymbals, and gonga. Those in common use are the

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¹ For this note on Karen music and the score of the accompanying "hpi" I am indebted to Mrs. U. B. White, of Rangoon.

534 sion. It comprises a number of slender bamboo tubes ranging from a foot or more to three or four feet in length, bound together in a bundle by rattana. "Hpi ba" is the name applied to the instrument by the Karen, who play it with considerable skill and use it frequently. It is said to be of Talain or of Siamese origin.⁴



MUSICAL SCORE OF A KAREN "HPI" OR PIPE

The Toungoo Karen, either the Ker-ko or the Padaung, make an instrument, which suggests a bag-pipe, by inserting five bamboo tubes in a gourd. The player blows into the stem of the gourd and fingers the holes in the tubes to produce the different sounds.

[177] * These graduated-pipes exhibit a striking similarity to those found in Malacca, Burma, and the Philippine Islands: Hunt and English, *Native Music of the Malay Peninsula*, Vol. II, p. 16; Ross and McDougall, *Native Music of Burma*, Vol. II, p. 232, and the figures opposite p. 122; Cole, *Native Music*, p. 134.

Illustrations of musical instruments used by the Kachin and Chinthei tribes of the Congo region, including just such a bag as the Karen have, are given in George Grenfell and the Congo, Vol. II, p. 719. An instrument like the graduated-pipes of the Karen is shown in A. W. Krumpholtz's *Four South African*, Vol. II, p. 142.

FEASTS TO THE "BGHA"

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● I remember being asked by a family, who had become Christians and were discarding the old ways, to destroy these utensils for them. They had not yet freed themselves of their fears sufficiently to perform an act that seemed to them like desecration.

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796 Families who are about to adopt Burmese customs or to accept Christianity, generally dispose of all their pigs and fowls, with the



UTENSILS FOR THE SACRED "BGHA" FEAST OF A TWO KAREN FAMILY, BARBERS DISTRICT.

exception of two or three of the latter and one of the former. When the time for a feast arrives, they make the usual preparations; but before the pig is killed, one of the elders will put his hand on its side and inform the "Mü xa" that the family are about to make their last offering and beg the demons to dismiss them and allow them to go in peace. This rite is called "Ta aw-k' tew kwi Bgha" literally, "eating to finish the 'Bgha'." The statement that this is the final offering is repeated in every address to the spirit uttered during the course of the feast. If the parents of the head of the family are living, they construct a little house and put into it offer-

MOUNT "THAW TH" — RELIGIOUS CULTS

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ings of rice and meat in order to satisfy the appetite of the "Egha." Families who thus terminate their relations with their special divinites, observe the tabu of not keeping pigs and fowls again for a period of three years. Not all families who become Christians observe this rite, for many times they make the transition by simply smacking the "Egha" once for all.

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RELIGIOUS CULTS

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of between six and seven thousand persons. The future development of this movement will be watched with interest for, under the direction of a few trained preachers and others, it affords an excellent opportunity for the Karen to show what they can accomplish in the way of religious progress by themselves.

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If they can maintain their ideals, administer the affairs and discipline of their church, and increase its membership, while continuing friendly relations with other Christian bodies in Burma, they will be worthy of all praise.

Contemporaneous with the founding of the independent church by Ko San Ye, a former priest of the Church of England started the "Hkli Bo Pa" cult in the Toungoo Hills, basing his preaching on a misapprehension of a passage of Scripture. He has instituted a form of worship with peculiar practices, has been excommunicated from the Anglican body, and has since been carrying on his labors with only indifferent success.

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TABU

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the purpose of improving the conditions and keeping their crops from being ruined. Failure to observe this custom brings disappointment ("t kle t htwa"), for one's labor will be worse than useless. On the plains, where they prepare a dirt threshing-floor after the Burman style, it used to be prohibited to drive a cart across it or to walk on it with shoes on. In other sections, where the threshing is done on a great mat, no one may step on it but the members of the family who take part in the work. The succulent shoots of vegetables, which are grown with the paddy, must not be cut with a sharp knife or other instrument, inasmuch as cutting would endanger the "k'la" or life principle of the paddy and scare away the demons that preside over the fields. Both the vegetables and their shoots, the latter being largely used for greens, must be plucked with the fingers. Another tabu prevents the eating of flesh during harvest-time. Any family who should transgress this precept would find, it is believed, that their supply of rice had vanished from the storage bin.

The following examples of tabus relating to domestic animals may be cited. If a sow or bitch has a litter composed only of females, they must all be killed. When less than three chicks are hatched from a nest of eggs, they must be killed. So also must the chick whose down dries fast to the feathers of the mother hen. A crowing hen is likewise doomed to death. These phenomena are supposed to be signs of weakness in the creatures concerned, for which some offended demon is responsible. Such weakness must not be allowed to spread.

Certain tabus contribute to preserve the integrity of the family through the female line. One of these prevents any outsider from entering a house where the family is celebrating the "Bgha" feasts. Indeed, a tabu debars from such gatherings the men who have married into the family, while those who are privileged to attend must remain in the house during the performance of the rites.

On the plains, where the Karen villagers build separate houses after the manner of the Burmans, persons are forbidden to drive their carts through the village road close enough to the houses to bump against the supporting posts. This tabu, which, in the eyes of a Westerner, partakes of the nature of a town ordinance, is enforced upon the offender by the imposing of a fine, namely, four annas in money or a fowl, payable to the heads of the household con-

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342 cerned. In the hills the money is put in a hole in the bamboo ladder leading into the house or, in lieu of a money payment, the fowl is hung under the house. Some persons, who have received the fine in the latter form, have shown a prejudice against eating it. I have been told that the British Government officials have upheld this tabu, when the collection of the fine has been resisted by the offending party.

784
551 Perhaps there is no more widespread tabu among the Karen people than that of personal names.²² I have known some individuals for years without knowing their names and have used the common expedient of calling them by the name of their eldest son. A man who served as our cook for years in the Baptist school at Tharra-waddy I knew only as "Ba Gyaw's father;" although I did finally discover his own personal name. For a boy to mention his father's name is almost equivalent, according to Karen ideas, to the son's wishing his parent's death; for the spirits, learning the latter's identity, might destroy him. Instead of speaking of his wife, a man will talk of the mother of his children, or of his oldest child whose name he may think it safe to mention. Not long ago a young man of good education, who was engaged in filling his blank application for a marriage certificate, was confronted with the fact that he was unable to give his mother's name. Not infrequently parents bestow opprobrious names on their children, in order to deceive the demons into thinking them too unworthy to be molested.

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823 During the month of July, when the streams are in flood, the people observe the tabu of the rising and falling of the waters ("ta dū ta htaw ta law"). They refrain from labor, make an offering of a fowl all of one color on the path near a stream, and utter the following prayer: "O Lord of the great water and the small water, of the oceans and the lakes. We are offering you a large sweet fowl and sweet rice. Flow in your own banks as usual, so that we shall not be drowned or fall into the water to be devoured by crocodiles and dragons. Watch over us on our journeys, eat our offerings, and do not molest us." They then examine the fowl's bones and the gall-bladder of a pig, and, if the omens are favorable, they swim the stream three times. In case no mishap occurs, they believe that their offerings have been acceptable and that they will prosper. If the omens are not propitious the first time, they try

²² See Chapter XVIII on Birth Customs and Childhood, p. 176.

CHAPTER XXIX

GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE KAREN

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797 If one were planning to start a movement to transform the life and religion of a race, one would not be expected to choose a savage bandit—a cutthroat who had taken part in the murder of at least thirty persons—to promote his enterprise. But such was the first Karen, under the providence of God, whom Dr. Adoniram Judson, the founder of the American Baptist Mission, undertook to teach.¹ Dr. Judson purchased this man, Ko Tha Byu, who was about to be sold into slavery in payment for a debt, in the hope of gaining access to the Karen, of whom he had hitherto had only fleeting glimpses. Notwithstanding the fact that the bandit was then in middle life, seemed to be hopelessly stupid, and yielded at times to his diabolical temper, Dr. Judson was rewarded for his months of patient effort in trying to teach this most unpromising pupil by seeing his mind begin to open. Ko Tha Byu became eager to learn and gained the ability to read the Burmese Bible. His whole life underwent a gradual transformation. When the Rev. George D. Boardman went to Tavoy for the purpose of establishing a mission station, he took Dr. Judson's pupil with him and baptized him there on May 16, 1828. In this obscure way was begun the movement that has resulted in the remarkable growth of Christianity among the Karen can, therefore, be regarded as complete, which does not contain missions during the last hundred years. No account of the Karen can, therefore, be regarded as complete which does not contain some mention of the widespread influence of the Christian religion among them, raising them from a humble position to one of importance and transforming them to such an extent as to cause their Burman neighbors to marvel greatly at the change.

¹The Rev. Adoniram Judson, D.D., was the first missionary of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society. He landed in Burma, July 12, 1812, and began his labors among the Burmese under great difficulties. His zeal as a Christian apostle, his remarkable linguistic attainments, and the terrible imprisonments he endured, have given him a place among the foremost missionaries of modern times. While he always maintained a friendly and helpful attitude toward the Karen people, he devoted himself almost entirely to the Burmese. His compilation of the Burmese grammar and dictionary and his translation of the whole Bible into Burmese, are among his great contributions to the Christianizing of the country.

GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE KAREN 297

Immediately after his baptism, Ko Tha Byu set out for the Karen villages in the hills. He was shortly to confirm a tradition, then current among the people, to the effect that one day their long absent "white brother" would return to them from across the great waters, bringing the Lost Book which they had looked for with unabated expectation.¹ His message of good news was received with wonder and surprise by the elders in the jungles. Delegations accompanied him to Tavoy to see the "white brother" and listen to his teaching. Among those who came was a prophet, who a few years before had bought from a white sailor in Tavoy a book that he had since regarded as a fetish. On examination this book proved to be a Book of Common Prayer; but the elders accepted the message of their white brother, Mr. Boardman, as the fulfilment of their own prophecies, and a number of them were soon baptized. They wished to learn to read, and Ko Tha Byu became their teacher. Later he traveled in the Moulmein district, and it was there in 1832 that Dr. Wade, while engaged in reducing the Karen language to writing, first learned to his great surprise that the old poems of the Karen contained the "Y'wa" tradition.²

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In 1833 Ko Tha Byu removed to Rangoon to carry the good news to his countrymen in the Burmese territory of Pegu. By the end of the first rainy season the report had spread throughout the jungles of this region, and groups of Karens came in from a wide area, some to learn more about the mission of the white brother and others to receive immediate baptism and admission into the Christian Church. The movement grew apace and attracted the attention of the Burmese authorities, who forbade the Karen to come to Rangoon and imprisoned those whom they caught, among these being the influential young chief of Bassein, Ko Shwe Waing, who was only released through the good offices of the English resident, Mr. Edwards.³

Determined to carry back to his people a few copies of certain religious books which had been prepared for the Karen, the young chief succeeded in smuggling them out of Rangoon. He traveled by unfrequented jungle trails and, on reaching home, hid the books

¹ *The Karen Apostles, or Memoir of Ko Tha Byu*, by Dr. Mason, gives an interesting account of this first Karen convert. Unfortunately this book is now out of print.

² Letter of the Rev. George Dana Boardman in the *Missionary Magazine*, Boston, Mass., Jan., 1836, p. 21.

³ Journal of the Rev. Jonathan Wade, *Missionary Magazine*, May, 1833, pp. 154, 2.

⁴ Rev. T. Than Byu, *The Karens and Their Progress*, p. 21.

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in a bundle of old clothes. Long after nightfall, stealthily by ones and twos, men and women came to his house. Guards were posted outside of the village, and the bundle was brought out and unwrapped until, by the dim light of a wick burning in an earthen cup filled with oil, the books were disclosed, including a Bible that was regarded as the now recovered Lost Book. At the sight of this unspeakable treasure some of those present bowed down and worshiped, others wept, some touched and caressed the sacred book, some kissed it, and some gazed long and curiously at its title. They crowded around the volume so thickly that the chief lifted it high above his head, in order that all might see, and all gazed at it with bated breath. They had been permitted to witness the return of their book, and they believed that they were no longer to be members of a despised nation.*

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The years just preceding the annexation of Pegu by the British Empire, were hard ones for the Karen Christians. Their faith was severely tested by persecutions. Thra Klaw Meh, pastor of a Bassein church, and the converts of his village were imprisoned for their acceptance of the new religion. Their friends collected a handsome sum for their ransom, and all but the pastor were released. He was ordered to give up preaching, but, refusing to do so, was subjected to torture for days and finally was disemboweled and shot. Others were much persecuted, many suffering martyrdom both before and after the Second Burmese War.† Until Pegu was annexed by the British Government in 1853, no missionaries were allowed to remain permanently in Lower Burma. Hitherto the work for Bassein had been directed by the Rev. E. A. Abbott and his associates from Sandoway, in Arracan, and that for Rangoon and vicinity had been supervised from Moulmein. But as soon as the country was opened to resident missionaries, Dr. J. H. Vinton removed to Rangoon and established the headquarters of the mission there, near Mission Road, where his descendants are still supervising the activities of some ten thousand Karen Christians. The Rev. E. A. Abbott removed to Bassein and put the mission work of that district on a permanent and self-supporting basis. He has

* Thra Thra Nya, then a little boy, went with his mother to see the Book on this notable occasion.

† In the Rangoon district Thra Ng Lay escaped martyrdom only through the occasion of a new governor, whose first official act was to release him on the eve of his execution day. However, persecutions did not deter such men or their descendants from becoming preachers. Both Thra Klaw Meh and Thra Ng Lay have had sons in the ministry, and their grandsons have since been in the Theological Seminary at Rangoon, preparing for the same calling.

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been succeeded by several able missionaries, including Dr. C. A. Nichols, the present superintendent, under whose direction certain industries have been started, including a saw-mill, a rice-mill, and a launch-building plant. Twelve other important centers for work among the Karen were established by the American Baptist Mission. The founding and conduct of churches and schools have been carried on in and from all of these centers. In 1853 Dr. Francis Mason finished his admirable version of the Bible in Sgaw Karen. Meantime, Dr. Jonathan Wade was engaged in preparing dictionaries and a grammar of the Sgaw and Pwo dialects. The Bible was also translated into Pwo Karen by the Rev. D. L. Brayton. A Karen Theological Seminary was organized by the Rev. J. G. Binney in 1845 at Moulmein. This institution was later removed to Rangoon and still later to its present location in Insein, where the Rev. D. A. W. Smith, D.D., served for many years as its president. The Baptist college at Rangoon, now called Judson College, has served the Karen young people, both men and women, since its organization in 1875.

Careful statistics do not appear to have been kept during the early years of the Baptist Mission, and it is, therefore, difficult to discover how many of the Karen became Christians. In 1856 eleven thousand, eight hundred and seventy-eight communicants were reported, but this number includes many estimated returns. From that time on there has been an almost steady increase in the membership of the Baptist Mission, which numbered in 1919 fifty-five thousand, three hundred and fifty-three communicants enrolled in Karen churches, representing a nominal Christian community of two hundred thousand souls.* In this same year there were nineteen thousand, four hundred and twenty pupils in the Karen mission schools, including both the Anglo-vernacular and the village-vernacular schools, the converts contributing 375,426 rupees or \$125,142 toward the maintenance of these. Not only do the Karen Christians contribute to the support of their schools, but also to that of their churches and pastors. For this purpose they expended 38,596 rupees or \$12,856 in 1919. In the same year they gave to benevolences outside of their own fields 152,203 rupees (\$50,734) for home and foreign missionary work and 184,627 rupees (\$61,532), making a total of 375,426 rupees or \$125,122 for all purposes.

* Annual Report, American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, 1919, p. 194.

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Apart from the generous sums of money which the Karen Christians give, many of the men who have been trained in the schools have manifested the spirit of self-sacrifice by going out to the more distant tribes and some even into China, despite their small pay, in order to carry the Gospel and its civilizing influence to the people in those regions.

The Roman Catholic Mission began its labors among the Karen in the forties of the last century at Myaungmya, near Twante, in Palaw township, Mergul district, and at Bassein. About two thousand persons were baptized. It was not, however, until the arrival of Bishop Bigandet that the work of converting the Karen was undertaken in earnest, and it has been continued ever since. In 1919 there were seventeen stations under the charge of resident priests and approximately twenty-five thousand, three hundred and fifty converts, including infants.* At many of these stations schools are conducted, which together enroll a large number of Karen children.

The Church of England Society for the Propagation of the Gospel entered the field at Toungoo in 1871, taking over some three thousand members of the Baptist Mission. The work has been carried on from that city, where two separate missions are maintained. Early in 1919 the Anglican Bishop of Rangoon wrote that "the total number of Christian people (in the Toungoo region) is about five thousand. Of these sixteen hundred are communicants. About six hundred are under instruction with a view to baptism. The Karens contributed about £250 to the funds of the two missions during the year."† About fifty boys and the same number of girls are boarders in the Toungoo schools. The number of pupils in village schools is not available.

While the figures given above supply a certain index to the success of the missions among the Karen people, it must be remembered that they do not illuminate particular features that have become an important part of modern mission work. The most significant of these features are the education of the children, the training of the men to become intelligent leaders in their communities, and the inculcation among the women of better ideals as home-keepers, all contributing to the elevation of the people. If these results are not measurably attained by the mission work at the

* Notice on the Roman Catholic Mission in South Burma by the secretary of the Diocese, dated Moulmein, March 1, 1919.

† Letter of the Bishop of Rangoon, dated Rangoon, February 12, 1919.

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present time, it is regarded as falling short of its proper aims. When the people have realized sufficient growth and stability in Christian character and have gained the breadth of vision to enable them to assume leadership in their religious affairs, it will be time for the white teachers to allow them to undertake the responsibility. In the past it has been too much the custom to place undue emphasis on creed and dogma. The development of character through Christian experience is the primary object to be attained, and without the formation of admirable character no abiding result can be achieved. The Baptist Mission—I can not speak for the others, although they may maintain similar ideals—demands total abstinence and the surrender of all animistic religious practices as prerequisites for church-membership. The Baptist denomination is convinced that these requirements have been the means of social and economic progress, although the enforcement of them has tended to limit the growth in numbers. No doubt, much may still be done in the way of character-building among the members of the churches; but when we consider the environment of the people and the fact that they have had less than a century of Christian development, may we not say that they have made remarkable progress.

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CHAPTER XXX

THE PROGRESS OF THE KAREN RACE

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178 Although the Karen tribes have probably lived in Burma and Siam for more than a thousand years, in company with the Burmese, Shan, Siamese, and Chin, occupying no territory that they did not share with other people except the hills of Toungoo and Karenni, they have remained curiously isolated. Politically subordinate to the ruling races in the countries in which they had settled, except in the last named localities, they were subjected to oppression and exploitation, which they could resent only to the extent of local raids against poorly defended villages or of occasional assaults upon stray foes caught in the lonely jungle or in outlying districts. The inevitable result of these conditions was mutual hatred of the races, which was intensified on the side of the Burmese by their feeling of contempt for the subject race; while the enforced clannishness of the Karens drew sustenance from the conviction that their "golden age" lay in the past, and that the customs and precepts which they had inherited from the matchless elders of that age were not to be changed. There was nothing in the religion or life of the Burmese that appealed to the Karen, even if it had been offered to them—certainly nothing from which they could expect any amelioration of their condition. Progress was almost impossible to people so situated, who could only look vaguely into the future for the deliverer, the "white brother," whose coming was foretold in their traditions.

177 The acquisition by the British East India Company in 1827 of the provinces of Arracan and Tenasserim, on the western and southern coasts of Burma, respectively, made little impression on the Karen at the time, although it was the beginning of a new era in their history and that of Burma—one in which the ideals of justice and fair play were to become increasingly operative. Christian missionaries were beginning their labors in the country at the same time, thus making possible the spiritual emancipation to which the Karen had looked forward. The significance of these events lay in a double revelation, which the missionaries first imparted.

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[323] That the Karen were eager for a change of administration is shown by several circumstances. In the first expedition of the English forces against Ava in 1826 they served as guides and were commended for their good faith by Major Snodgrass.¹ In the provinces that fell under British control they found themselves sympathetically dealt with and soon began to take on new ways; but in the province of Pegu, where the old regime of Ava still held sway, they continued to suffer from oppression. They were prohibited from visiting their teachers in Rangoon, and the Burmese viceroy of the city threatened, even as late as 1851, to shoot instantly the first Karen whom he should find capable of reading.² In the Second Burmese War (1852) they are reputed to have again acted as guides to the attacking force, which took the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, the most formidable military work near Rangoon, by assault in the rear.³ The Burmese knew that the Karen regarded the English as their deliverers and took vengeance on them accordingly, burning all their villages within fifty miles of Rangoon, seizing or destroying their stores of rice, and putting men, women, and children to death in barbarous ways.⁴ No wonder that a large number of the oppressed and persecuted people migrated from the delta of the Irrawaddy to Moulmein, or across the Arracean hills into those provinces where they could dwell in security. Even under British rule conditions were not what they might have been, for there were frequent miscarriages of justice on account of the employment of Burmese officers in subordinate and local positions.⁵

Nevertheless, the new order of things in Burma has brought progress in many respects. The continual raids and forays, which previously devastated numerous Karen villages, have been stopped. The administration of justice has been taken out of the hands of private individuals and placed in those of accredited officials. Marked progress in education has been made. A new literature in the vernacular has come into circulation. Christianity has made a strong appeal to the Karen. Finally, in the World War the people again showed their loyalty to the British Empire by offering their services in its defense. Such of these topics as have not been

¹Major Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 140, 142.

²Callista V. Luther, *The Vintons and the Karens*, p. 80.

³I have repeatedly heard the statement that Karens served as guides in this war, but I can not verify it by reference to any work at hand.

⁴Callista V. Luther, *The Vintons and the Karens*, pp. 80, 90, 92, n.

⁵For instances of miscarriage of justice, see Mason, *Burma*, pp. 610-618; Smenton, *The Loyal Karens of Burma*. I regret that similar instances are not hard to find, even at the present day.

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treated elsewhere in this volume will be briefly discussed in the following paragraphs.

The cessation of open hostilities between the Karen and the Burmese has largely mitigated the old animosity existing between them. Where members of the two races live in close proximity, however, some friction is still produced. Nevertheless, the Karen's dislike of their neighbors is not so great as to prevent many of those living on the plains from adopting Burmese ways and speech. They do this not out of admiration for things Burmese, but because of the prevalence of Burmese culture and in order to avoid the appearance of rusticity that marks those who fail to conform. Some not only wear the dress of the Burmese and speak their language—always with more or less of an accent—but also, except the Christians, go to the pagodas and participate in Burmese feasts. A number of wealthy Karens, who have moved into the larger Burmese towns along the railway line and live there in Burmese style, have to all appearances lost their racial identity. In many cases those who have copied the manners of their neighbors, experience a decided weakening of their old religious faith and its moral restraints, being led into evil ways by Burmans of the less respectable classes, with whom they fraternize.

The first experiment of the British in the administration of justice among the Karen, was not successful. It consisted in appointing certain influential Karen chiefs to serve as magistrates for their people. This plan was unsatisfactory because some of the appointees were reluctant to assume authority, and also because the different tribes were much intermingled. It was, therefore, decided to try the cases of Karens, like those of the members of the other races, in the ordinary courts. While this method is correct in principle and an improvement in practice, it has not always been administered by representatives of the English nation or in the spirit of British justice. A closer supervision of the courts is needed to curb the prejudices sometimes manifested by the local magistrates.

The progress of the Karen in education has been very marked. Their "Lost Book" having been restored to them by their "white brother" in the person of the Christian missionary, they have been most eager to learn to read it. This has been true from the early years of missionary activity. Before the British had established orderly government in Burma, one American missionary had pupils in her school in Moulmein almost every year who came over two

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hundred miles through the jungles by night, "not daring to travel by day," for the sake of learning to read the Bible in their own tongue.* The number of mission and Government schools began to increase rapidly, being scattered in all parts of the country. Every Christian church had its accompanying school, and in recent years many, if not most, of the non-Christian villages have come to have their schools also. The early Christian teachers, realizing the dangers lurking in the new conditions, began aright by teaching self-control, as well as the usual subjects, infusing the whole educational movement with moral purpose. The result has been more than gratifying. "It is not often given," says Mr. D. M. Smeaton, late Chief Commissioner of Burma, "to witness such a remarkable development of national character as has taken place among the Karens under the influence of Christianity and good government." Another observer adds: "Where only a few years ago were tribal wars, child-stealing, house-burning, and savagery, now are quiet, orderly villages, each with its preacher and teacher, chapel and school." †

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The *Fifth Quinquennial Report on Public Education in Burma*, covering the years 1913-1917, inclusive, gives the number of Karen children in school as 34,896, an increase of twenty-five percent over the total for the previous five-year period. This number is about three percent of the total Karen population. The figures for the Burmese are not given. Judging, however, from the number of Buddhist school children, which is 531,541 and includes the children of some Karens and most of the Shan, while excluding those of a few Burmans, the Burmese have under six percent of their population in school. The Shan have 5,730 school children, or about one-half of one percent of their population. ‡

From their village school the children, boys and girls, go to the mission boarding-school at the district or mission headquarters or to some neighboring Government school, where they learn English and, if they progress so far, prepare for college. A considerable number of Karen young men and a few young women are college graduates and are leading useful lives in various communities, as may be seen by looking over the list of officers in Government positions in the Education, Forest, Police, Military, and subordinate branches; while others are doing well in business and the

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* Callista V. Luther, *The Vintners and the Karens*, pp. 32, 33.

† H. P. Cochrane, *Among the Burmans*, pp. 273, 275.

‡ *Fifth Quinquennial Report on Public Education in Burma* (for the years 1913-17), p. 23.

177 professions. Perhaps the most prominent Karen, the Hon. Dr. San
873 C. Po, is a physician, graduate of an American medical college, who
463 has served for several years in the Legislative Council of the
province of Burma, being the first member of his race to be thus
honored.

177 With the progress of Christianity and education has come liter-
212 ature. As soon as the Karen language had been reduced to writing,
the missionaries began to prepare books for the people. In this
work they have been assisted by a number of educated Karens.
Thus far these translators have provided in the vernacular the
Bible, a few plays of Shakespeare, *Pilgrim's Progress*, the *Arabian
Nights*, and short stories and pamphlets in large number. Dr.
Wade, with the aid of Saw Kau Too, has compiled *The Karen The-
saurus*, a vernacular encyclopedic dictionary of language and cus-
toms in four volumes, which is a work of great value. Christian
literature, in the form of commentaries and text-books of various
kinds, has been largely supplied by Dr. E. B. Cross, Dr. D. A. W.
Smith, and the Rev. T. Than Bya, D.D. An admirable collection of
hymns has been brought together, including both some of the Eng-
lish favorites and some original hymns composed by Karens as well
as by missionaries. The largest number in the collection by one
writer is by Mrs. J. H. Vinton. Of the seven or eight vernacular
newspapers and monthly periodicals all but one or two are under
native management. The "*Dawkula*" (*Karen National News*) is a
biweekly, the others being monthlies, of which the *Karen Morning
Star*, founded by Dr. Francis Mason at Tavoy in 1841, has had a
continuous existence and is the oldest vernacular periodical in
southeastern Asia.

The American Baptist Mission Press at Rangoon has been from
its establishment the headquarters for Karen printing. Karen type
were first manufactured here and the first pages struck off in the
new characters. Here also the linotype machine has been adapted
to vernacular use. Other Karen presses are in operation at Bassein
and Toungoo.

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177 At the time of the Third Burmese War (1885), when the Karen
were suffering from brigandage which threatened to devastate the
whole country, certain leaders of the race began a movement to
develop a national spirit among the people, who had always been
clannish and provincial. Some progress was made immediately
[702] after the war through the formation of Karen levies, without which
the province could scarcely have been brought back to a state of

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good order. At length the Karen National Association ("Daw k' lu," meaning literally "the whole race") was organized. All the districts in which the Karen live were represented at its first meet-

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REV. THWA' MAUNG YIN, OF BAGSEY

He held the rank of honorary havildar in the Karen battalion of the Burma Rifles, 1917-1920, and was most highly commended by his commanding officers for his wholesome influence as a religious teacher.

ing, a few non-Christians attending, although the leaders were Christians. The aim of the association was simply to promote the economic and educational interests of the people, as well as to plan for their representation at public functions, such as on the occasion of viceregal visits. Funds have been raised for these purposes, but,

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668 unfortunately, through mismanagement, have not proved to be per-
 177 manent. During the World War the association served as a mouth-
 piece for the expression of the loyalty of the race and did some
 active work in recruiting. It furthered the sending of deputations
 to meet the Montague Commission and later sent a rather ill-
 advised delegation to England to promote the national interests,
 which have been so much emphasized as a result of the world con-
 flict.

668 The military activities of the Karen have been largely confined
 in the past to village raids. There have been times when there
 was a prospect that a real leader might arise to unite a large group
 of villages into a kind of state and carry on warfare on a large
 scale. One such attempt was made by a Karen, of Martaban or
 Shwegyin, who assumed the Burmese title of "Nūn Laung" or
 Coming Prince—a favorite title with rebellious members of the
 Burmese court who tried to usurp the throne. This adventurer
 organized a religio-political movement among his compatriots
 throughout the region from Siam to Bassein. They expected him to
 fulfil a prophecy to the effect that the Karen would drive out the
 foreigners and establish a new dynasty at Pegu. However, this
 rebellion was soon put down and its leaders were driven into Kar-
 enni, where they disappeared.*

701 The Karen levies, which did so much to re-establish peace
 throughout the province of Burma after the Third Burmese War,
 and, for the most part under their missionaries as officers and with
 but little military organization, captured some of the dacoit lead-
 ers after scattering their followers, rendered a service deserving
 of more credit than it received at the time. Local and racial feeling
 was still running too high, and official circles did not always under-
 stand the situation fully.¹⁰

Soon after these services, which were rendered by most of the
 Karens gratuitously and with arms which they had paid for, ma-
 licious rumors were circulated that these men were of doubtful
 loyalty. The result was that they were divested of their arms
 and given no compensation whatever. It still remained true, how-
 ever, that they had saved their homes, protected the honor of their

* *British Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. I, p. 488; *Imperial Gazetteer, Burma*, Vol. I, p. 335; Lieut. Gen. A. Pyche, C. S. I., *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, Ch. 3, quoted in an article entitled "The Karens" in the *Rangoon Gazette* of June 6, 1917.

¹⁰ For an account of the capture of Bo Hlun, the notorious dacoit, in Toungoo, see the closing chapters of Cumming's *In the Shadow of the Pagoda*. These chapters are quoted in Dr. Bealer's *See Thaw*, pp. 248-276. The murderers of Mr. Barba, the deputy commissioner of Toungoo, were apprehended by the Karen levy in that district.

KARÉNS

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381. KAREN VILLAGE.

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[854]K
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clearings (*taungya*), on which they raise one crop, and remove to fresh sites every season. On the fringe of the mountain tracts the Karéns are more or less Burmanized, and practise Buddhism, being attracted by the prestige of the religion, with its great festivals in which everyone is free to share—especially now that they can mingle in the towns without fear of their quondam oppressors. The barbarous *Myin*, which the Burmans themselves are beginning to disuse, is one of the first marks of the contact of the Karén with the dominant race. The Karéns settled in the lowlands are known as Taláing-Kayín, and Bamá-Kayín. The men know Burmese, and dress like Burmans. The Karén is noted for truthfulness and chastity. The former characteristic is probably to be accounted for by absence of coercive *régime*, their society being, as Macpherson says of the Khonds, pervaded by

in small numbers, chiefly as pilgrims to the Buddhist shrines, of which the chief is the Shwe Dagón, in Rangoon (p. 188).

The Karéns are the most important hill-race of the country, and best exemplify the mode of life of the quasi-aboriginal tribes, whom Burmans, Taláings, and Shans have kept out of the plain-land. The "white Karéns," Sghaw (*Sghraw*) and Pwo, occupy the mountains between Burma and Siam. They have colonies in mountains far to the east and west, and have also spread into the plains adjoining. They call themselves *Baganydw* (*Bghrraganydw*), and call the Burmans *Baydw*. The Burmans call them *Kayín*, and familiarly *Tha-ngi-dyín*—playmate, in much the same way as we say "Jack Burman" and "John Chinaman." The Karéns get their living by making hill-forest



382. KAREN MOTHER AND BABE.

31: Scherman--29 E-4 (no date) 1915 AP1 Burma

Shan AP11

Karen AP7

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342 Inside, one first enters a room, on the left side of which, against the wall, stands a Buddha altar. This serves as a reception room. On the right side are the fireplace and the kitchen utensils. Behind this, the left part of the house is partitioned into two bedchambers. The right part of the house serves as a shed for agricultural implements and mat supplies. It does not have a raised floor on piles.

Figure 6 shows the interior of a modest Taung-yo village house in Myinka (north of Kalaw). It has a length of about 12 meters, a width of 8 1/2 meters and a height of 4 1/2 meters. Three rows of posts, about 2 1/2 meters apart, carry the roof. On the inside, the space in front of the first row of posts is used as a shelter for buffaloes or oxen, and also for rice provisions which are stored here in large baskets. Half of the width of the hut, behind the first row of posts, serves as a workshop /215/ where the husking of rice, etc. is done. The other half, built on a pile substructure, about 1 meter high, is used as living and sleeping quarters. A few steps lead to a platform with a railing. At the side of the platform by the wall, stands a rack for Buddha pictures and flower vases, while at the side facing the interior is the fireplace and next to it a structure for storing cooking utensils, etc. A bamboo mat wall separates the tiny bedrooms. The space under the rounded rear awning is used as a shed for roofing grass supplies, agricultural implements, etc.

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101 The Karen tribes which belong linguistically to the Sino-Siamese group, live in lower Burma from the Mergui Archipelago to Toungoo. In the west they extend as far as the eastern slopes of the Arakan Yoma, and in the east to the Salween, in the southwestern part of the Shan States and K
Karenni States--1911: 1,102,695. Large groups
● [177] of them are already more or less Burmanized in their clothing and customs. Many of them have

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RELIGION

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among different tribes. In many of the more civilized sections they are no longer carefully observed. Christians do not resort to them. 776
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Sex irregularities are believed to be most abhorrent to the *bgha* and are reputed to have been the cause of most trouble. Among the Bwès they are considered to cause the drying up of land and the failure of crops, and are therefore most severely punished by the elders when discovered. In their primitive state the Karens were unusually free from fornication and adultery. The recent transition period, with the breaking down of old customs and before Western ideals have been established, has seen some relaxation of these conditions. 776
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The old epic song about Ywa, the Father God and Creator, and this belief in the existence of God are found among all the tribes. It does not, however, play an important part in their daily lives which are taken up with their struggles with the ever-present *nals* and demons. 771
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Those Karens who were in closest contact with the Burmans, as for example the Pwo Karens, took on a thin veneer of Buddhism and went to the pagodas at the full moon and the quarters, but as a rule it was largely a social conforming that did not have a deep spiritual content. 779
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VI

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Karen is an agglutinated monosyllabic language belonging to the Sinic family of languages. Like the Chinese it has tones, which are important in learning to speak it, for the same sound may have entirely different 194
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